

Washington, DC -- Congressman Vern Buchanan's (R-FL 13) efforts to address problems with the medical holdover process exposed by the scandal at Walter Reed Medical Center took one more step closer to law as the House of Representatives passed its annual defense authorization bill. The House-Senate defense authorization conference bill includes language similar to Buchanan's patient tracking system legislation (H.R. 1579) and authorizes necessary funding for the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Members of our armed forces have volunteered their service and sacrificed their health to help ensure our freedom and security," said Buchanan. "They deserve the best possible care. That's why I have worked to ensure these wounded warriors are not be left alone to navigate a bureaucratic system that leaves them in limbo and sometimes denies them the health care and benefits they have earned. Passage of today's legislation finally makes available important information regarding the status of a patient's care and helps cut through the red tape to ensure that our wounded soldiers get the first-class care they deserve in a timely manner."

The fiscal year 2008 defense authorization bill, which passed the House by a vote of 370 to 49, would establish uniform procedures to help locate patients and track their appointments. This new policy mirrors legislation Buchanan introduced by March (H.R. 1579) to create a standard soldier patient tracking system to locate any patient in the medical holdover process. The Buchanan bill was endorsed by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, and the Disabled American Veterans.

In addition to improving patient care, the annual defense authorization bill puts forth spending for a host of new ships, planes and ground systems, including \$17.6 billion for vehicles that can better withstand bomb blasts. The measure also includes:

- An across-the-board 3.5 percent increase in military pay;
- \$1.2 billion to continue to purchase personal body armor and other protective gear; and,
- \$4.8 billion requested to procure and develop electronic jamming devices designed to detect and disrupt the radio signals used to detonate remote-control bombs and mines.